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ABSTRACT

One of the most striking societal changes in recent years is the increasing participation of mothers in the labor force. Since college-educated mothers are especially likely to work, a potentially important source of information about the effects of maternal employment is the introductory psychology course. To study the features of mothers in the work place, 28 introductory psychology texts, published from 1992-1997, were analyzed for inclusion and treatment of the effects of day care and maternal employment on children. Two-thirds of the books mentioned these topics, compared with only half of textbooks published from 1981 to 1990. Although texts published from 1992 to 1997 devoted more attention to these topics than did earlier books, coverage still remained limited. Only nine references were cited by four or more texts. The latter texts were less likely than earlier ones to express positive news about day care and maternal employment and were more likely to present evenly balanced views. More recent texts focused less on whether day care/maternal employment is "good" or "bad," and more on the variables that mediate the effects of maternal employment and day care. (EMK)

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Abstract

Day Care and Maternal Employment in 1990's Introductory Psychology Textbooks

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Twenty-eight introductory psychology texts published from 1992-1997 were analyzed for inclusion and treatment of the effects of day care and maternal employment on children. Two-thirds of the books mentioned these topics, compared with only half of 1980-1991 textbooks. While 1990's texts devoted more attention to those topics than earlier books, coverage remained limited. The number of references cited increased in the 1990's books. Only nine references were cited by four or more texts. 1990's texts were less likely than earlier ones to express positive news about day care and maternal employment and were more likely to present evenly balanced views.

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One of the most striking societal changes in recent years is the increasing participation of mothers in the labor force. Approximately 75% of married women with school age children and 60% of those with preschoolers are employed (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). College-educated mothers are especially likely to work. Given these demographics, knowledge of the impact of maternal employment on children has great relevance for college students.

A potentially important source of information about the effects of maternal employment is the introductory psychology course, one of the most highly enrolled undergraduate courses. Introductory psychology textbooks can play a major role in conveying facts and attitudes about maternal employment to students.

Consequently, Etaugh, Selchow and Massey (1993) examined the treatment of maternal employment and day care in introductory psychology textbooks published between 1970-1991. They found a dramatic increase in coverage of these topics over the 22-year period. There was virtually no coverage in the 1970's but about half the books from 1980-1991 mentioned the topics. The effects of day care and maternal employment were viewed more positively in 1986-1991 books than in texts published in 1980-1985. More recent debates about the effects of day care (e.g., Belsky, 1988, Clarke-Stewart, 1989) began to appear in some of the 1990 and 1991 texts, raising the question of whether textbooks of the early to mid-1990's have changed their views about day care and maternal employment. Therefore, the present study examined the treatment of day care and maternal employment in introductory psychology texts published in 1992-1997.

Method

Twenty-eight introductory psychology textbooks published between 1992 and 1997 were sampled. Two-thirds (19 of 28) texts mentioned the targeted topics, compared with only half of 1980-1991 textbooks. The following four measures were recorded independently by two raters for each text: a) number of pages and number of lines devoted to day and maternal employment; b) number of times a given reference was cited, along with its currency; c) number of times a given author was cited; d) rating of the text's evaluation of the effects of maternal employment and/or day care on children as being either 1) totally negative; 2) mostly negative; 3) evenly balanced between positive and negative; 4) absent; 5) mostly positive; or 6) totally positive. Interrater reliability for the four measures ranged from 89 to 100%. Differences between raters were resolved through recalculation and discussion.

Results and Discussion

While 1992-1997 texts gave more attention to maternal employment and day care than 1980-1991 texts, coverage remained limited. 1992-1997 texts devoted an average of 54.8 lines to these topics, compared with 46.9 lines in 1980-1991 books. The mean number of maternal employment and day care references increased from 5.4 in 1980-1991 to 8.8 in 1992-1997. However, only half of the 1992-1997 texts cited references that were no more than six years old, compared to 60% of the 1980-1991 texts. No single reference was cited extensively. Only nine references out of 102 were cited in four or more texts (Belsky, 1988; Belsky & Rovine, 1988; Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Field, 1991; Hoffman, 1989; Lamb & Sternberg, 1990; Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993; Scarr, Phillips, & McCartney, 1990;

Silverstein, 1991). The most frequently cited author, Belsky, appeared in 16 of the 19 texts; followed by Clarke-Stewart (12) and Scarr (11).

In 1992-1997 texts, attitudes toward employed mothers and day care became more evenly balanced than in 1980-1991 books and were more likely to conclude that day care and maternal employment per se have no effects on children. The percentage of 1992-1997 books expressing a mostly or totally positive view dropped to 21% from 57% in 1980-1991 texts. The 1992-1997 texts focused less in whether day care/maternal employment is "good" or "bad", and more on the variables that mediate the effects of maternal employment and day care. This shift in viewpoint is discussed in light of recent empirical research on the effects of maternal employment and day care.

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TABLE 1

Percentage and number of textbooks expressing various views about effects of day care and/or maternal employment on children.

Effects	1980-1985* %	n	1986-1991 %	n	1992-1997 %	n
Negative; nothing positive mentioned	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0
Mostly negative; some positive mentioned	25.0	2	5.0	1	5.3	1
Evenly balanced between positive and negative	12.5	1	35.0	7	47.4	9
No effects	12.5	1	0.0	0	26.3	5
Mostly positive; some negative mentioned	37.5	3	50.0	10	15.8	3
Positive; nothing negative mentioned	12.5	1	10.0	2	5.3	1
Total	100	8	100	20	100	19

*Includes Hilgard (1975)